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STOREHOUSE OF MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE

By Richard Montague

1. On a knoll in the grounds of the National Institutes of
2. Health, ten kilometers from downtown Washington, men and
3. machines are building a new home for a century-old treasure
4. house. A handsome five-story structure faced with white
5. limestone, it will shelter the National Library of Medicine,
6. which serves doctors and medical technicians all over the
7. world.

Founded in 1836, the library is a clearing house for medical information printed in thirty-two languages. On an average day it fills more than 300 requests from medical libraries in the United States and other lands. It also receives and catalogues hundreds of articles and books -- many of them written by foreign doctors. This continuous accumulation of new material has resulted in a collection of medical literature which has been described by British Museum authorities as the greatest in existence.

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1. The collection now comprises more than 1,000,000 books, 2. monographs, theses, pamphlets, microfilms, pictures, and 3. other informative material dealing with medicine. At the 4. outset it consisted of 200 books acquired by the first chief 5. of the U. S. Army's Medical Department. For the library began 6. as an army adjunct and remained so until 1956 when it became part of the U. S. Public Health Service. 7. 8. Most of the collection is now squeezed into a red brick 9. building near the Washington Monument, but this ancient 10. structure can't hold it all. Some of the overflow of 11. about 35,000 other volumes, dealing 12. with medicine in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth 13. centuries, is lodged in a branch library in Cleveland, Ohio. 14. Dr. Frank Rogers, director of the library, tries to obtain one copy of everything significant printed about medicine anywhere 15. 16. in the world. To this end the national institution conducts numerous exchanges of its own and U. S. Public Health publica-17. tions in return for other medical literature. Some of these 18. exchanges are with the 600 libraries in American medical 20. schools, hospitals, pharmaceutical houses, medical societies. 21. and industrial firms. Some are with medical libraries in 22. other countries. For example, the library now has exchange 23.

arrangements with about thirty libraries in the Soviet Union

including the State Central Medical Library in Moscow and the

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- 3. United States and the Soviet Union on exchanges in the
- 4. cultural, technical, and educational fields, /agreement which
- 5. has since been extended. As a result, the library in
- 6. Washington is supplying thirty-four commercially-published
- 7. American medical publications to the State Central Medical
- 8. Library in Moscow in return for Soviet periodicals of
- 9. comparable value.
- 10. The national library's two main publications are its monthly
- 11. Index Medicus and its annual Catalog. The Index annually lists
- 12. more than 100,000 articles from all over the world. The monthly
- 13. output is cumulated at the end of each year by the American
- 14. Medical Association, a privately-supported organization of
- 15. physicians.
- 16. The Catalog lists books, pamphlets, and other materials, both
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- 18. Dr. Rogers and his aides also put out several other publica-
- 19. tions. When a subject is found to be especially popular, a special
- 20. bibliography is prepared. In 1958 the library published a ninety-
- 21. page Guide to Russian Medical Literature which lists works by
- 22. Soviet doctors and tells how they may best be obtained. More
- 23. recently it has published bibliographies on space medicine.
- 24. psychopharmacology, cancer chemotherapy, and fungus infections,
- 25. and a reference guide to documentary motion pictures on medicine

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- 3. of the inquiries the library receives, for they show other
- 4. medical libraries what books and articles are available on
- 5. what subjects. The institution deals mainly with other
- 6. libraries, although individual researchers may use its stacks and
- 7 . study tables. If a physician wants late information on the
- 8. incidence of leukemia in adults, for example, he seeks it
- 9. first at his local medical library. If the local library can't
- 10. help him, it forwards his request to the national library.
- 11. Normally the national library sends microfilm or photoprint
- 12. copies of the material requested, though original works are some-
- 13. times loaned. A photoduplicating machine
- 14. makes microfilm pictures of two book pages simultaneously,
- 15. and another machine enlarges the pictures and transfers them to
- 16. a paper strip which is cut into convenient sizes for mailing.
- The library / more than 3,000,000 of these 17. pages
- 18. every year. Half are sent out in response to requests; the other half are kept to replace deteriorating pages.

 The library also receives hundreds of requests each year for
- 18a. 19.
- reproductions of pictures and portraits concerned with medicine. 20.
- Tts art collection includes some 60,000 items including original 21.
- 22. woodcuts, etchings, engravings, and oil paintings.
- 23. pictures show the development of medical science down the
- centuries. About 30,000 are portraits of medicine's great 24.
- men and women, including all the Nobel Prize winners to date in 25.
- medicine and physiology. The picture collection is growing at 26.

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That many physicians do not take themselves too seriously is indicated by a large and popular collection of medical caricatures, both in color and black and white, by such artists as Rowlandson, Cruikshank, Hogarth, and Daumier. There also is a big stock of lantern slides, maps, posters, and hospital plans and sketches.

One of the never-finished jobs in the library is the repair and preservation of books and magazines whose paper is crumbling with age. Many old books are rebound each year, and yellowing journals are routinely microfilmed and -- if especially useful -- reproduced on rag paper and bound. Another quiet project is the microfilming of medical school theses, of which the institution has 280,000 from many parts of the world. As an experiment to gauge the demand for such documents, library workers are microfilming 15,600 theses -- comprising 515,000 pages -- acquired from the University of Berlin.

Machines do much of the library drudgery. One device photographs 230 catalogue cards a minute for inclusion in the Index Medicus. And the machine which transfers enlarged microfilm pictures of book pages to a paper strip turns out six meters of such pictures a minute. But automation will not completely take over the routine work until somebody invents machines which can analyze and index books in thirty or more languages. (more)

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7. As a side line, the library prepares exhibits of medicine,

8. past and present, for display in the nearby Smithsonian Institu-

tion, a government-sponsored organization which encourages

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15. Sechenov, I.P. Pavlov, and other specialists in this field.

16. The move to the grounds of the National Institutes of Health

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18. of scientists from more than thirty countries have worked with

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- 5. "Naturally we're excited about it. We like to think of the
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